

Abercrombie Blasts Pentagon for 2007 War Supplemental

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A senior House Armed Services Committee member is lashing out at the Pentagon for submitting a request for emergency funds that contains items not immediately necessary to the war effort.

Rep. Neil Abercrombie (D-Hawaii), chairman of the Air and Land Forces subcommittee, is warning the administration that the 2007 war supplemental is not going to be another "blank check."

Supplementals are supposed to cover "unforeseeable expenses or critical funding for war-related expenditures," Abercrombie said in a statement. "But this 2007 supplemental contains billions of dollars for purchases that are far from emergencies."

For example, the Air Force wants to replace two \$20 million fighter aircraft with \$200 million Joint Strike Fighters that won't be operational for at least three years.

"These are not aircraft that are critically needed in combat today," said Abercrombie, who has been squaring off with high-ranking Pentagon officials in recent weeks. "Congress has already given other weapons systems a more urgent priority."

Abercrombie also has criticized a \$14 billion request for new armored vehicles, including 58 M-1 Abrams tanks, 168 Bradley Fighting Vehicles, 111 Stryker light armored vehicles, 121 M113 armored personnel carriers and 22 M88 recovery vehicles.

"If these were all replacements for vehicles damaged or worn out in combat, putting them in an emergency spending bill would be absolutely justified," Abercrombie said. "There's no doubt the Army needs the equipment, and the administration and Congress will have to make a multi-billion-dollar commitment for rebuilding the force, but this request goes far beyond replacing combat losses."

The 2007 supplemental funding request also includes \$131 million to buy 90,880 pairs of night-vision goggles. Abercrombie questioned whether night-vision goggles are emergency items or something the Pentagon should prioritize in its regular budget submissions.

Emergency supplementals have been a sore point with defense authorizers for several years because, traditionally, defense appropriators have approved those requests without any input from authorizers.

Legislation adopted last year requiring the administration to submit emergency supplementals with the regular budget request and to predict war costs as accurately as possible in the defense budget gives authorizers more of a say in the process.